

Wildlife Program

Week of December 12, 2011

LANDS DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Oak Creek Wildlife Area Addition Phase 3: With the closing of the 3,904.44 acre purchase from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, WDFW has completed the final phase of the Rock Creek block of the Heart of the Cascades project. This property is located approximately 25 miles northwest of Yakima just west of the Oak Creek and Wenas wildlife areas. This project has secured protection of an entire township for fifteen state-listed and four federally-listed species that occur in this area. This has been a partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The acquisition was funded jointly by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program under the Critical Habitat category and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service under a Habitat Conservation Plan grant. The property will be managed as a unit of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area.

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

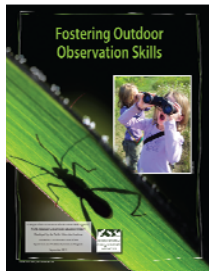
Columbia River Public Access Site Workshop: Steve Sherlock participated in a planning workshop with the National Park Service, Washington State Parks, Columbia Land Trust and the Washington Historical Preservation Office to review funding opportunities for several sites located on the Columbia River near Chinook, WA. Over two million dollars are available for the development of public sites of which WDFW's Knappton Boat Launch site is one under consideration. Sites would be developed with educational materials addressing the Lewis and Clark Expedition. WDFW looks at this as an opportunity to improve public water access facilities on the Columbia River. The project review process is ongoing with final determinations for funding to be made by the June of 2012.

OUTREACH

WildWatchcams: Another cam season is upon us and streaming video feeds have begun this year for the burrowing and barn owl cams as well as the bald eagle cam. Weekly updates will commence earlier than ever before and new materials are being sought for the *Related Links* and *Want to Learn More* section of each species page. Teachers, home schooling parents and thousands of others in Washington and abroad visit the cams frequently for intimate wildlife views and natural history information on the twelve Washington fish and wildlife species equipped with camera monitoring systems.

GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies with Margaret Tudor of the WDFW and the Pacific Education Institute launched the following free downloadable guides to assist teachers in outdoor and conservation education in Washington D.C., November 2011.

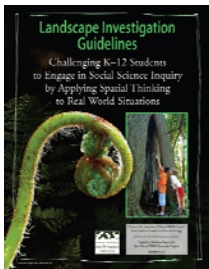
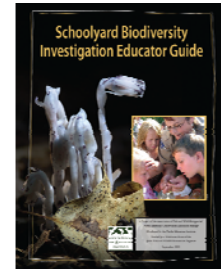


Fostering Outdoor Observation Skills

The first step in conducting field investigations is learning how to observe. This guide helps teachers connect students by observing the "book of nature."

Schoolyard Biodiversity Investigation Educator Guide

Targeted to elementary and middle schools, these guidelines teach students about biodiversity in their own schoolyard using field investigation methodologies.

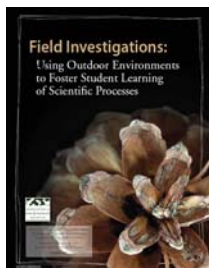
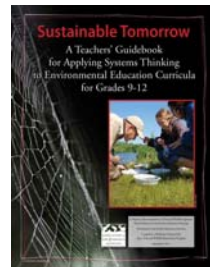


Landscape Investigation Guidelines

Challenges K-12 students to integrate science and social science inquiry by applying spatial thinking that natural resource professional's practice as they make decisions that impact fish, wildlife and other natural resources on landscapes.

Sustainable Tomorrow-Applying Systems Thinking to Environmental Education Curricula for Grades 9-12

Demonstrates how to apply systems concepts and problem solving tools used by fish and wildlife natural resource managers using lessons from Project WILD, Project WET and Project Learning Tree.



Field Investigations: Using Outdoor Environments to Foster Student Learning of Scientific Processes

Helps students learn the skills of field scientific inquiry and understand that science doesn't only happen in a laboratory or classroom. Outdoor field studies of fish and wildlife in natural settings increase students' problem solving abilities and motivation to learn science.

WILDLIFE DIVERSITY DIVISION

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE



Fishers: Biologist Jeff Lewis attended a fisher monitoring/research workshop at the Rocky Mountain Research Station in Missoula to discuss monitoring approaches, genetic techniques, research findings, and analysis approaches for fisher home range estimation and resource selection. He also delivered a complete set of blood samples to the station geneticist for an additional genetic analysis of the Olympic founder fisher population, at no cost to the Department. To learn about the Department's work with fishers, visit: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/fisher/> .

Cascades Red Foxes: Biologist Jeff Lewis assisted Mt Rainier National Park Biologist Mason Reid in capturing and radio-collaring two Cascades red foxes (a State Candidate species) at the Longmire and Paradise areas of the park (an adult silver males and an adult red/blond female; see pictures below). A group of foxes appear as frequent visitors of residency areas within the Park. Biologist Reid hopes to investigate the behavior patterns of these foxes, especially as those patterns relate to Park visitors and visitor areas. Reid hopes to capture an additional three foxes in the upcoming weeks and to track these five foxes for a full year.





Murrelet Conservation Report Completion:

Section staff completed preparation and submission of the final federal performance report - *Conservation and Management of Marbled Murrelets* - performed during September 2006-June 2011 under State Wildlife Grant No. T-6-1. This report summarizes work across western Washington reviewing forest practices effects on species habitat, and the evaluation of the efficacy of survey and review practices with respect to the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

applicable to Department of Natural Resources (DNR) lands. Information on Marbled Murrelets is posted at:

http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/research/projects/seabird/marbled_murrelet_population/.

REGION 1

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Columbia Basin Mule Deer Project: Biologist Ferguson ran a ground survey in the Whitman County to correlate to the aerial survey flown earlier this month. Our, Region1 ground survey composition counts closely approximate the composition counts accumulated on the aerial surveys flown.

Results for Aerial Surveys:

	Buck :100Doe	Fawn:100Doe
Mule Deer	23.0	76.7
White-tailed Deer	23.6	70.9

Results for Region 1 Ground Surveys:

For Mule Deer only –

Bucks:100Doe	Fawns:100Doe
24.74	74.21

Blue Mountains Deer Surveys: Staff conducted opportunistic deer road surveys in GMU 181 after foggy conditions prevented a planned aerial survey. We completed aerial surveys the following day after conditions improved and the helicopter was able to fly down from Spokane. We observed approximately 1,000 deer during the survey around the Asotin Creek area and breaks of the Snake River north of Highway 12.

Wildlife Areas

Society for Range Management Tour on February 1, 2012: Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area will be featured as one of the Technical Tours for the Society for Range Management's 65th Annual Meeting which will be held in Spokane next February. NRCS Range Management Specialist Courtney Smith stopped by Swanson Lakes on Thursday, December 15, along with BLM's Kerrin Doloughan. Smith was working with Doloughan and SLWA staff to nail down

logistics for a tour to SLWA this winter. The website for the SRM convention is:
<http://www.rangelands.org/spokane2012/>

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Wildlife Recreation Notes

The Colville Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is scheduled to take place on Saturday, 12/17/2011. Since 2002 a mean number of 55 species have been observed annually on this count (range = 35 – 64). If the Snowy Owl, as observed locally over the last two weeks, is detected tomorrow, that will be a first for this CBC. In past years the most abundant species detected on this count has shifted between two “exotics”: European Starling and Wild Turkey.

Winter Weather Conditions

Northeast Washington Wildlife Weather Synopsis: This week the snow finally returned with about 1-3 inches accrued in the valley area overnight Wednesday and into Thursday. With the snow came a moderate rise in temperature, with morning lows going from the high teens to the mid-twenties in degrees Fahrenheit. The fresh snow should help District Two in accomplishing their helicopter surveys of moose. In District One it will help concentrate turkeys into winter flocks and better facilitate transect surveys which will commence next week.

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area: The air stagnation pattern that predominated last week is still in effect. However, Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area received a small skiff of snow, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings (December 13 and 14). Total accumulation is less than one inch. Heavy overcast has become a daily routine, although the morning of Monday, December 12 was sunny. Temperatures have been holding between 20 and 30 degrees, day and night.

Blue Mountains: No significant weather to date. Snow level is still minimal on the upper winter ranges.

REGION 2

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Mule Deer: Biologists Hoenes finished conducting ground based mule deer surveys in GMU 284 (Ritzville Unit) as part of a collaborative effort with biologists from Regions 1 and 3 to monitor a migratory mule deer herd that winters in Adams, Franklin, and Whitman counties (results provided below). The purpose of conducting ground based surveys in addition to the aerial survey efforts is to determine whether or not parameter estimates are comparable between the two methods. If biologists determine that parameter estimates are similar then it may not be necessary to conduct aerial surveys every year which creates a significant cost savings. The results provided below are from data collected in GMU 284 as results from the entire effort are still being summarized.

Method	Total	Does	Fawns	Bucks		Unc	F:D	B:D	% Adults
				Yearling	Mature				
Ground	250	122	83	20	16	9	68:100	30:100	44%
Aerial	749	360	292	64	25	8	81:100	25:100	28%



Wolverine Research Project: Biologist Fitkin helped USFS staff complete the opening of wolverine traps to begin our 7th season of capture work. We're implementing two new changes this year. First, we started a month earlier than usual in the hopes of maximizing capture success. Second, we have installed satellite trap transmitters on the four most difficult to reach traps. This will enable us to check trap status (open or closed) remotely on a real time basis, and reduces the need to physically monitor some of these traps daily. This stretches the available USFS staff budget allowing for the early start and the

extended deployment of traps in prime occupied habitat along the Highway 20 corridor. The ongoing objectives of this project are to better understand wolverine demographics, distribution and ecology in the North Cascades Ecosystem. This project is also working to develop a long-term monitoring methodology for this important climate-change sensitive species.

Wildlife Areas



Washington ground squirrels
Biologist Finger and Wildlife Area Manager Fitzgerald met with BOR to discuss a proposed ground squirrel translocation to Steamboat Rock, where an old wheat field is in the process of being converted to native habitat. Though the site occurs within a relatively small and isolated piece of habitat, it is an

ideal site to test the efficacy of a "burrow-builder" (photo) because the site is completely absent of boulders. The emphasis here is to explore methods for restoring populations to recently rehabilitated sites where farming traditionally occurred in hopes that someday we could identify individuals willing to introduce ground squirrels to CRP or SAFE sites, where populations would have the greatest potential for growth.

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Areas

Habitat Restoration: Fifty-seven acres were aerially seeded on the 252 acre Umptanum Fire site that burned this summer. The areas that burned the hottest were seeded with a locally-adapted native seed mix.

Grazing Management: Regional staff participated in a Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) meeting to discuss the outcome of the 2011 grazing season. In 2011, L.T. Murray Wildlife Area staff controlled weeds and planted native vegetation at nine springs, installed nine miles of temporary electric fencing and built permanent fencing at eight of the nine springs.

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Wildlife Areas

Boat Launch: Improvement work continues on the Colockum Wildlife Area boat launch. Work completed to date includes installation of a CXT vault toilet, construction of an overflow parking lot, and partial completion of an concrete ADA loading platform.

Winter Conditions: Seasonal temperatures and dry conditions continue to be present and will continue for the coming week. Snow has melted off at the lower to mid-elevations and natural forage is still available to deer and elk. No winter feeding has started at Oak Creek, Wenas or L.T. Murray Wildlife Areas.

REGION 4

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Great Blue Heron Citizen Science Monitoring: Biologist Anderson corresponded with a People for Puget Sound volunteer regarding initiation of a citizen science heron colony monitoring effort at Edmonds Marsh. The effort will be part of a larger People for Puget Sound project involving restoration and enhancement of Edmonds Marsh. Anderson provided a basic monitoring protocol to follow so that volunteers can provide occupancy/productivity status to WDFW.

Priority Habitats and Species Mapping: District Biologist Milner worked on updating the waterfowl concentration sites currently mapped in the Priority Habitats and Species products.

Swan Mortality and Morbidity Study: District 14 Biologist DeBruyn participated in a conference call with Kristen Mansfield, Don Kraege, Manager Link and representatives of Puget Sound Energy and the Trumpeter Swan Society on developing a protocol for selecting swans for more extensive necropsies than we have been doing. USFWS funding for our swan program is requiring we look at causes of mortality in swans that do not seem to be lead poisoned or powerline strikes. DeBruyn also responded to many swan related issues.

Wildlife Areas

Lake Terrell Units: Wildlife Area Manager Kessler checked and monitored the water flow from the Lake Terrell dam to make sure there was enough stream flow for salmon in Terrell Creek. He coordinated with the Habitat Program on the water flows and the dam replacement project.

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

Wildlife Management

Cougar 3-Year Package: Biologist Kertson, Biologist Beausoleil, Biologist Maletzke, and Manager Martorello participated in a Webex conference call with Region 1 wildlife staff to discuss their recommendations for the cougar 3-year package. The discussion largely centered on the application of the 14% maximum harvest rate, subsequent harvest maximums for each Population Management Unit (PMU) in Region 1, and general concerns about cougar hunting in the Blue Mountains.

GMU 485 Deer Survey: Biologist Kertson conducted a post-season deer survey in the Green River Watershed with Muckleshoot Indian Tribe and Tacoma Water staff. Flying conditions were excellent and 59 deer were counted during the 2.5-hour survey, including a number of large, 4 pt. bucks. Biologist Kertson and MIT Biologist Dave Vales will use survey results to determine permit numbers for the 2012 deer hunts in GMU 485.

WDFW Outreach to new Immigrants in the Seattle Area: Biologist Anderson presented “Why Backyard Wildlife” lecture to 30 students at the Redmond Library “Talk Time” class. The class is a group of recent immigrants to the Seattle area. They get together weekly to practice English and learn of U.S. culture. The class included students from Japan, Guatemala, India, France, China, Iran, Vietnam, Mexico, and a few other countries. The presentation included the brief lecture and follow-up hands-on session. This provided opportunity for the students to study specimens of local wildlife closely, ask questions while practicing their English, and learn how to work with their family and community to keep urban wildlife from developing nuisance patterns. This also provided for discussion of legalities and WDFW information resources to assist in dealing with nuisance and injured wildlife, recreational harvest of fish and wildlife, and other aspects related to how the state of Washington works to manage wildlife for conservation of species and their habitats for the benefit of Washingtonians.

Winter Marine Waterfowl Surveys: Despite the fog and low clouds that persistently occur in Western Washington and make surveys a day-to-day decision, Biologists Cyra, Evenson, and Murphie were able to successfully continue the annual winter waterfowl surveys in the marine waters of the Salish Seas. Areas in southern Puget Sound, Admiralty Inlet, eastern Straits of Juan de Fuca and Skagit and Padilla Bays were flown. These annual surveys provide trend data on the health of marine waterfowl populations wintering on the Salish Sea, and are also used in the annual harvest setting negotiations in the Pacific Flyway for waterfowl. The flexibility, professionalism, and support of the staff of Kenmore Air has been greatly appreciated and is integral to the successful completion of these surveys.

Deer Hunting on Private Land: District Biologist Milner met with staff from the Whidbey Camano Land Trust to review the hunting access program on a section of land that the Trust owns. For three weeks during the deer season, this parcel is closed to all users except deer

hunters in an effort to reduce crowding and conflicts between various user groups who value the property. They report very positive reviews. Milner also worked with their GIS specialist to map large tracts of land under single ownership on Whidbey Island.

Private Lands/Access

Sustainable Lands Strategy: Manager Link participated in a meeting to discuss and outline the elements of a Sustainable Lands Strategy "Farm & Fish package" for the Stillaguamish estuary and floodplain. Present were SLS Executive Committee members, Conveners, Support Team, and Participants.

Waterfowl and Snow Goose Quality Hunt Program: Biologist Roozen and Technicians Otto and Deyo continued repair and maintenance of Waterfowl and Snow Goose Quality Hunt Program parking and blinds. They also continued public use surveys for Waterfowl Quality Hunt Units, and made several landowner contacts to answer questions and address any issues on their properties.

Wildlife Areas

Island Unit: Natural Resource Tech Hacker continues to manipulate water levels to improve hunting conditions on the Island Unit. Low rainfall and river levels have resulted in limited sheet water flooding conditions in many areas.

Samish Unit: Manager Schuster has been providing information for cultural resource survey applications to Ducks Unlimited regarding the historic land use of the Samish parcels. The cultural resource information is needed as a portion of the NAWCA grant requirements for the recent funding award.

GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE.

Wildlife Management

Snoqualmie TPC Elk Hunt: Biologist Kertson spent the majority of his week responding to public inquiries on, and objections to the use of Master Hunters on the Tournament Players Championship (TPC) golf course located on Snoqualmie Ridge. Enforcement officers have been working closely with golf course staff over the past two years to alleviate damage caused by a band of 20-25 elk. The elk have been spending considerable time on the course despite repeated use of pyrotechnics, cracker shells, golf cart pursuits, and other non-lethal techniques. The failure of these efforts led the golf course to request participation in the Elk Area 4601 Master Hunter hunt.

Officer Moszeter, Officer Capelli, and Hunt Coordinator Jim Gildersleeve met with golf course staff on Monday the 5th to discuss the use of master hunters. The officers and the hunt coordinator inspected the proposed site and determined a hunt could be carried out safely and decided to remove two animals in an attempt to alter the behavior and movements of the remaining group. On Monday the 12th, the Snoqualmie Police Department issued a press release that provided limited information on the hunt. Local television and print media quickly picked up the press release and began reporting the story, sometimes providing incomplete or false information.

Consequently, Region 4 and WDFW headquarters staff were inundated with phone calls and emails from both concerned citizens opposing the hunt and hunters wanting to participate.

Biologist Kertson was charged with responding to > 250 phone calls and emails received by the Director, Fish and Wildlife Commission, Wildthing, Game program staff, and Region 4 customer service. He had many interesting conversations and interactions with those who contacted WDFW and several people relaxed their opposition upon learning more information. Almost all who were contacted appreciated a follow-up from WDFW. The story continued to generate controversy until the California-based owners of TPC decided on the 15th to cancel the hunt due to public pressure.

Living with Wildlife Website Updates: Biologist Anderson is working with Information Technology Specialist Ushakoff to update and clarify information on the Living with Wildlife Bats website, as well as update links on each mammal page of the Living with Wildlife Series.

Winter Waterfowl Survey Flight Following: District Biologist Milner assisted Waterfowl Specialist Evenson and his crew by flight following them during one day of aerial surveys.

Wildlife Areas

Region 4 Private Land Access Program: Natural Resource Tech Hacker assisted the Private Lands access program staff with improvements to parking areas.

Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Citizens Advisory Group: Manager Paulson conducted the first Snoqualmie Wildlife Area Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) meeting since the Wildlife Area was split from the Skagit Wildlife Area. The group inquired about the management plan for the next year and is looking forward to having their input on the 2013-2014 plan.

REGION 5

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Wildlife Management

Western Pond Turtles: Biologist Holman continued work on the annual report to Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), summarizing completed work related to western pond turtle management in the Columbia River Gorge area. This year various tasks were undertaken, including continuation of the head-start program which resulted in collection of 74 juvenile turtles. Other activities included significant habitat improvements at all four pond turtle sites, mark/re-capture population investigations, environmental education, turtle releases, increased predator control efforts, etc. Thanks to BPA for their 2011 funding of the Western pond turtle work.

Western Pond Turtles: Biologist Holman compiled and summarized data that will help generate a population estimation method for western pond turtles. The model in development relies on the capture history of individual animals as well as their length and weight at the time of capture. The summary included 5 years of mark-recapture data at the Pierce National Wildlife Refuge western pond turtle site.

Biologist Anderson met with US Forest Service staff to discuss preliminary habitat improvement projects on their lands in the spring and fall of 2012. Included in this work will be continued weed control, mowing, and creation of down woody material for increasing basking sites for western pond turtles. In addition, Biologist Anderson discussed 2012 funding with the

Woodland Park Zoo for western pond turtle work in the Columbia River Gorge. Their funding would primarily assist with head starting efforts and control of non native bullfrog populations.

Mt. St. Helens Elk Herd Study: Regional Wildlife Biologists removed collection points from several locations in Region 5 and stored the materials associated with this effort. The locations had facilitated the gathering of cow elk organs for body condition evaluation. Approximately 2000 antlerless elk tag holders within the Mt. St. Helens Herd area were asked to submit the heart, pericardium, kidneys, teeth, and reproductive tracts from any yearling or older female elk that they harvested. The effort spanned early muzzleloader hunts in October, continued through the November modern firearm elk seasons, and concluded with various late hunts to mid-December. The samples will be evaluated for body condition, reproductive status, and age during the coming winter. This long-term project is one facet of the Mt. St. Helens Elk Herd Study and was done in cooperation with the University of Alberta and NCASI (National Council for Air and Stream Improvement). Thanks to all the elk hunters who submitted samples for evaluation.

Wildlife Areas

Shillapoo Wildlife Area

Pasture Mowing: Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Hauswald completed mowing all pastures for the year at Shillapoo Wildlife Area this week. A total of approximately 600 acres is mowed every year, starting in early July, to provide forage for wintering waterfowl and for weed control in many of the pastures. The pastures are mowed to a height of about six inches to provide suitable conditions for wintering Canada geese and Sandhill cranes.

Klickitat Wildlife Area



Grazing Monitoring: Wildlife Area Manager Van Leuven conducted site visits to the Fisher Hill grazing permit area with biologists Fornes, Anderson, and Weinheimer. Biologists hiked to key areas of the grazing permit area to evaluate stream habitat, riparian habitat, fish habitat, and grazeable woodland and steppe habitats. Deer and immature bald eagles roosting in a snag were observed on the property during the site visits. Pools in the creek were checked for fish habitat quality. The streambed is mostly comprised of large rocks, with a highly variable flow volume (picture - Wide Sky Creek). Many indicators of environmental integrity were scored well, but some items were difficult to evaluate due to the season. It was agreed that the site should be revisited during the growing season and when stream flows are stronger to better understand the current condition of the resources.

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Wildlife Management

Trout Lake Elk Area: Biologist Anderson provided hunting and access information to late season elk permit hunters with tags for Elk Area 5062. Few elk have been seen to date in this area due to mild winter conditions. The hunt periods begin on Dec 15th and extend until the end of January. This hunt is specific to private lands with an emphasis on controlling damage to agricultural lands.

SW Washington Goose season: This week Management Area 2A saw a couple of busy days with a total of 51 hunters checking in 131 geese at a rate of 2.57 geese per hunter. The Cathlamet station checked in 34 geese harvested from 11 hunters this week while Woodland saw the most traffic at 30 hunters checking in 78 geese. One dusky was harvested out of zone 1 this week, however all zones continue to remain open to goose hunting. A reminder that there will not be any goose hunting in Management Area 2A on Sunday December 25th and Sunday January 1st. In addition, the check stations will be closing at 4:00pm on December 24th. Hunters should adjust their schedules accordingly to accommodate this early closure on Christmas Eve. Last week a total of 61 hunters brought in 126 geese to be checked at the three check stations in Management Area 2A. The Vancouver check station saw the most hunters that week with a total of 26 hunters and 45 geese or 1.5 geese per hunter. Cathlamet saw the fewest numbers at 17 hunters checking in 39 geese or 2.35 geese per hunter. One Dusky was harvested out of zone 4 this week, bringing the total number of dusksies harvested to 7.

Wildlife Areas

Shillapoo Wildlife Area

Watchable Wildlife: Habitat Technician Boylon had a rare sighting this week of a Snowy owl on the Shillapoo Wildlife Area. Usually only seen wintering as far south as Northwest Washington, it appears that the owls are wintering further south this year with many reports of the birds being seen in the southern half of Washington in search prey. Due to a low population of lemmings this year on the tundra on their summer range, the owls are dispersing further south in search of food. This situation happens about every ten years as the lemming population goes through its natural population cycle. Other birds recently seen at Shillapoo include a Merlin, Egrets, Blue herons, Pintails, Mallards, Bald eagles, and Short-eared owls.

GOAL 3: USE SOUND BUSINESS PRACTICES, DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

Wildlife Areas

Shillapoo Wildlife Area:

Phase 1, Historic Properties Management Plan completed: Wildlife Area Manager Calkins received final copies of the Phase 1 document from the contractor. This phase of the project inventoried cultural resources on the Wildlife Area, which will help inform future planning efforts. Phase 2 of the plan will get under way after the conclusion of the intertidal habitat evaluation that WDFW staff have been involved in for about 2 years.

Other

Regional Office Storage Coordination: Regional Program Managers with the help of program staff held cross program discussions regarding use of space in the office shop and other secured areas. Unfortunately, the overcrowded situation had become emotional and tense at times. An allocation of space between users has been reached that is as reasonable as possible, given the limited storage available does not meet all program needs. The programs will present the revised plan to Regional Director Norman for final approval.

Winter Conditions:

D-10 & MSHWA Winter Conditions:

Past Weather: November temperatures were below normal and precipitation was slightly above average. Snow accumulated in mid and low elevations early in the month, but was later melted off by a major warm rainstorm. The first half of December was dry, but temperatures were below normal.

Short-Term Forecast: Temperatures are expected to be slightly warmer over the next week with low to moderate precipitation. Snow levels remain above 3,000 feet. The 6-10 and 8-14 day outlooks both suggest temperatures in the normal range and precipitation amounts below normal.

Long-Term Forecast: The longer term outlook maps suggest below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation throughout the winter, but it appears now that spring may be more moderate than previously forecasted.

Habitat: Lower elevation areas currently have little snow cover providing for reasonable forage availability. Use of grasses and forbs on the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area has been light to date and only minimal use of shrubs has been noted.

Snow Depths: Areas below 3000 feet remain mostly snow free. Snowpack is below average. See attached spreadsheet for detailed information (12Dec2011-MSH_Sno-Depth.pdf).

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations noted to date. On December 5, 2011 a total of 116 elk were present on the Mudflow Unit monitoring area, which is below levels that would raise concerns.

Animal Condition: No reports to date of animals in poor condition that can be attributed to winter conditions. Animals observed to date appear to be in good condition.

Mortality: None to report.

Public Contacts: None to report related to winter conditions.

The public is reminded that the Mudflow Unit of the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area lying East of a line defined by Hoffstadt Creek, The North Fork Toutle, and Deer Creek is closed to public access through April 30 to minimize disturbance and associated energy demands on elk wintering there.

District 9: Winter Conditions

Past Weather: Weather in the South Cascades has warmed this week and rainfall/snowpack is below normal. The area continues to be in a low precipitation period with temperatures above normal during the day. Approximately one inch of snow fell this week in the lower areas of the South Cascades, leaving most areas open to big game use.

Winter Severity: The Klickitat Wildlife Area is snow-free and forage habitat continues to be available. There is little concern for the current severity of the winter conditions on big game populations in Skamania County and the western portion of Klickitat County. The eastern portions of Klickitat County have had no snow accumulation and deer are in good condition.

Habitat: Habitat is open and forage habitat continues to increase with warming mid day weather.

Animal Concentrations: No unusual concentrations seen due to inclement conditions.

Animal Condition: Animals appear to be in good condition and no winter stress has been reported.

Mortality: None documented this week.

Public Contacts: No concerns raised by the public this week.

REGION 6

GOAL 1: CONSERVE AND PROTECT NATIVE FISH AND WILDLIFE

Deer Project: Staff investigated the mortality of the collared Dry Creek doe. The doe appeared to be in rather poor condition and there was recent predation on the carcass (likely from a cougar). It is unknown if the doe was actually killed by a cougar. The two fawns from the doe were heard in the vicinity. A monitoring flight took place on December 16th and all remaining deer were found to have “live” signals.

GOAL 2: PROVIDE SUSTAINABLE FISHING, HUNTING AND OTHER WILDLIFE-RELATED RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

Centralia Mine Elk: Biologist Tirhi met with staff from TransAlta who own and manage the Centralia Mine six miles NE of Centralia. Tirhi had requested the meeting in order to encourage the company to provide increased hunting opportunity and assistance with herd monitoring. The mine supplied coal to TransAlta’s Centralia thermal generating plant until November 2006 when TransAlta stopped active mining operations and is now focused on compliance and reclamation activities. Approximately 7,155 acres have been disturbed for mining activities on the property since 1971 and most of that must be reclaimed (e.g. restored to habitat). A primary reclamation objective is planting timber, of which thousands of seedlings have been planted and hundreds of thousands planned. This, along with abundant grasses on the mine coupled with minimal hunting pressure has resulted in annual increase in the resident elk subherd. Biologist Tirhi is interested in maintaining an acceptable herd size and reducing damage on the mine and the surrounding private farms, which are also experiencing increased annual elk damage. Because the mine is in active production, hunters must be accompanied on the mine at all times.

The mine is an ideal location to increase hunting opportunity for disabled and senior hunters, who find it increasingly difficult to find access in urbanizing Thurston and Lewis counties. The mine has offered to allow additional hunting and to help with surveys in the coming years.

Private Lands/Access

Private Timberland Access: Bios Harris and Michaelis visited some of Rayonier timberlands in GMU 642. Leased lands and lands open to public access were visited. Efforts to better understand their holdings are being made to better aid us in discussions regarding public access. Bio Harris checked signage on the southern portion of the Wynoochee road closure (GMU 648). Old and new signage was still in place. Still needs a lot of work. In addition to checking signage some of Rayonier's timberlands that are open to public access were visited.